

Four-Box Analysis

When a group is struggling through a difficult period, four-box analysis is a method it can use to regain direction and a sense of purpose. This technique allows the team members to deal with any aspect of their work together, to recognize strengths they may have been overlooking, and to pinpoint areas for improvement. The team must answer four questions:

1. What is not going well and is flexible (can change)?
2. What is not going well and is firm (not likely to change or not within the group's power to change)?
3. What is going well and is flexible (can change)?
4. What is going well and is firm (not likely to change or not within the group's power to change)?

Figure 10 shows how these questions structure a four-box diagram. Responses to question 1 are those things that

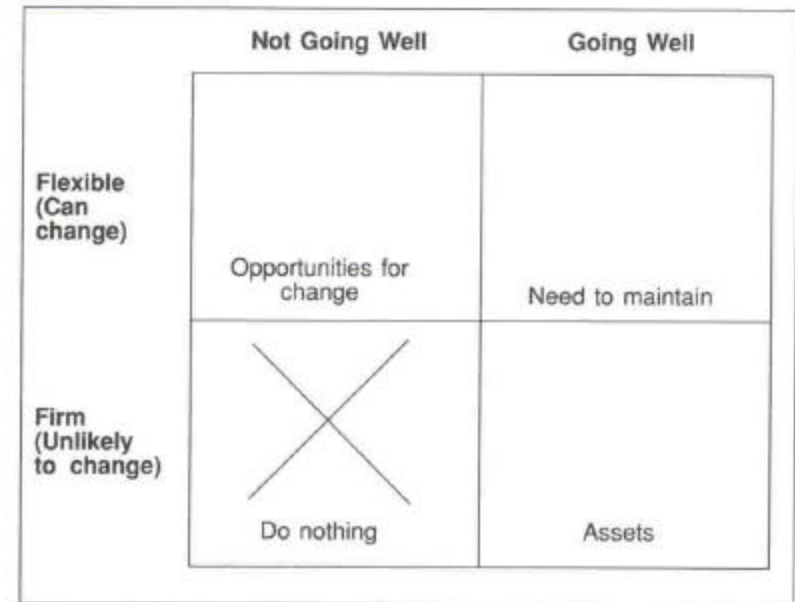


Figure 10. Four-Box Analysis

present the greatest opportunities for change. They are not going well, yet there is the potential for change. Responses to question 2 are things that are not going well but are out of the group's control. They are things about which the group can do nothing, so spending time and energy on them is unproductive. Responses to question 3 are things that are going well but, because they could change, need to be maintained. The group should continue to pay attention to these things and not take them for granted. Responses to question 4 represent those things the group can count on. They are going well and are not likely to change. These are the group's assets.

Once group members have collectively answered these questions and looked at their responses, they can focus on "opportunities for change." These are the things that need the attention of the group. The facilitator can

suggest prioritizing them or using some other means to decide where to begin.

A group that has been struggling for some time should probably pick one thing to focus on at a time. It might also pick something that will be easy and quick to change, so it can feel successful right away. Starting with a difficult item may discourage the group even further.

FOLLOW-UP

Once team members agree on a plan of action, they must continue getting together to keep track of their progress. If too much time passes between meetings, team members may lose their motivation and deadlines may go by unnoticed.

Follow-up meetings do not need to be long. They can be a few minutes in length. But it is important for team members to come together to ensure that their decisions are being implemented and their problems are being solved. (They do not have to go through the whole process of decision making and problem solving again.) Without timely follow-up to the work that has been done, the team will be less motivated to work hard on the next problem. And if no time is set aside for follow-up, a question arises: Should time have been spent on the problem in the first place?

This question brings us full circle. A meeting must have a clear objective, and that objective must be worth the time required not only for meeting but also for following up. Two of the most common errors that leaders make are (1) holding meetings without clear, published objectives and (2) failing to follow up on the work done at those meetings. Meetings are a waste of time if nothing valuable gets accomplished or if the valuable work that is done goes nowhere.

A truly facilitative leader views meetings as a primary means of getting people to work together and puts time and effort into planning and leading meetings. The techniques

and processes outlined in this book are only the basic tools for drawing successfully on team members' skills, knowledge, and diversity. The tools are not ends in themselves, nor are they exclusive or even unique to this book. But they will help leaders face the tremendous challenges of managing in an ever-changing, uncertain, and demanding world.